



HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE

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HFD kicks-off first Spanish Class by Firefighters for Firefighters

habla español? Soon, more Houston firefighters will answer "si" to this question. The Houston Fire Department kicked-off its first Basic Spanish Class taught by HFD firefighters for HFD firefighters, this week, May 31 and tonight, June 1, 2005 at 6 p.m. at 1100 Elder Street.

Increasing the number of Spanish speaking firefighters not only benefits the citizens of Houston, but also the many business people and tourist who travel through Houston as an international destination.

"Communication is key in handling emergency situations and a language barrier is difficult to cross," said HFD Community Outreach Division Captain Gilbert Bennett.

According to Captain Homero Ponce-Lopez, HFD Hispanic liaison and one of the teachers of this class, the response has been overwhelming.

"We originally limited the class to 30 participants, but due to the great interest in the class, we've increased the first class to 40 students," said Ponce-Lopez. "There are already 125 on the waiting list for future classes."

This is a 12 –week course with the same lesson plan covered twice a week to accommodate firefighters work schedules. The firefighters will be attending the course on their own time, while off duty and without overtime pay or regular pay.

"This adds another dimension to the emergency services we provide," said Fire Chief Phil Boriskie.

The City of Houston's E.B. Cape Center also offers city employees the opportunity to learn basic Spanish during normal business hours. Their classes traditionally fill-up very quickly. For more information on the E.B. Cape Center, visit <http://www.houstontx.gov/capecenter/>